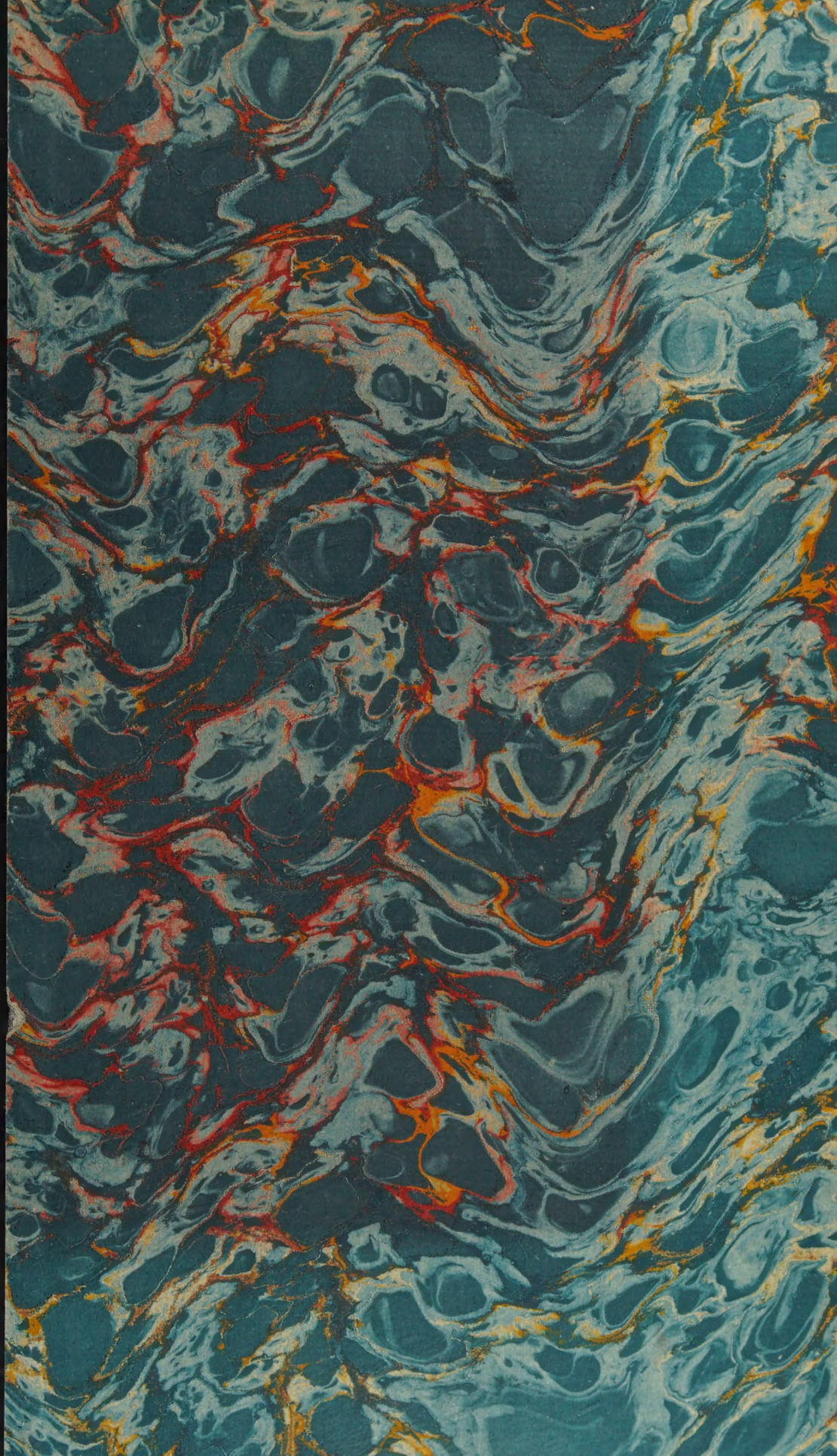

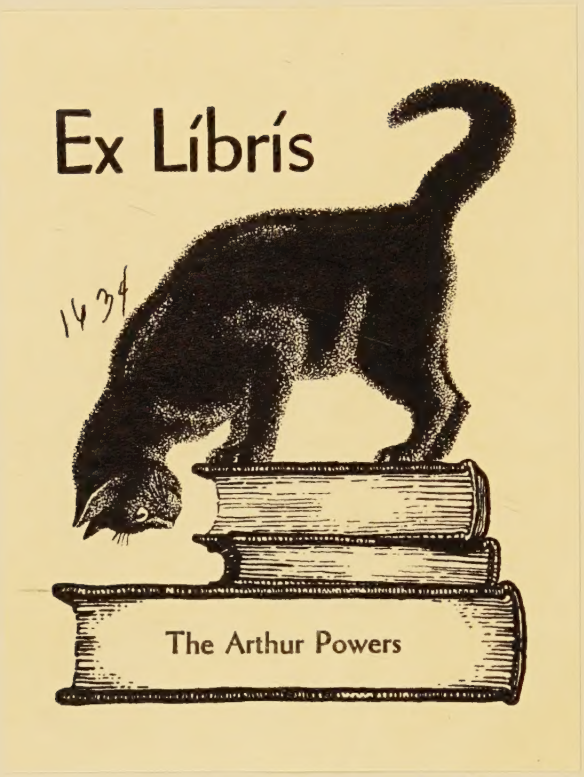
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COMUS

A MASQUE BY JOHN MILTON
WITH THE AIRS BY
HENRY LAWES

the huntress Dian her dread bow

THE MASQUE OF
COMUS

THE POEM BY JOHN MILTON

WITH A PREFACE BY MARK VAN DOREN

&

THE AIRS BY HENRY LAWES

WITH A PREFACE BY HUBERT FOSS

ILLUSTRATED WITH
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THE MASQUE OF COMUS

THE POEM
BY JOHN MILTON

PREFACE

BY MARK VAN DOREN

MILTON was two years out of Cambridge when *Comus* was performed at Ludlow Castle, Wales, in 1634. It was this great poet's good fortune to spend, after seven years at the university, seven more years in study and contemplation at his father's house in Horton, Buckinghamshire—in study and contemplation, and in the writing of a few poems which are among the masterpieces of their kind in English. These include *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, that pair of Day and Night pieces which everyone knows who knows Milton at all, and *Lycidas*, the supreme lyric of our language. They also include two masques, *Arcades* and *Comus*, which possess in common the distinction of having been asked for, or ordered, by Henry Lawes, one of the most accomplished musicians in Milton's time. *Arcades* as it comes down to us is incomplete, but *Comus* lacks no touch that Milton could give it during a process of revision ending with its publication in his *Poems* of 1645. It has always been one of his most interesting works; if it is not supreme as *Lycidas* is supreme, it remains lovely in many of its details, and even as a whole it has been the subject of much interpretation and commentary.

Sir Henry Wotton, writing to Milton in April 1638, about *Comus* and other matters, called the masque 'a dainty piece of entertainment' and went on to suggest that

although the drama was commendable in its entirety he preferred to note that he had been ravished by its songs, whose 'Dorique delicacy' moved him to say that he had seen nothing parallel to them in English. Sir Henry was probably not the first, as certainly he has not been the last, to suppose that the lyric parts of *Comus* contain its essence, or at any rate its chief excuse for being. And it is true that they are beautiful; indeed, the invocation to Sabrina has never been matched for the cunning, sweet deliberation of its rhythms. It is at least no more than matched by Lawes's music, which here and in the other songs deserves, doubtless, the compliment Milton paid it in his sonnet to Lawes composed a dozen years later.

> Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured song
> First taught our English music how to span
> Words with just note and accent, not to scan
> With Midas' ears, committing short and long,
> Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
> With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
> To after age thou shalt be writ the man
> That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue.
> Thou honour'st Verse, and Verse must lend her wing
> To honour thee, the priest of Phoebus' quire,
> That tunest their happiest lines in hymn or story.
> Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
> Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,
> Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

Lawes, Milton was saying, knew best how to accommodate his music to the verse he wrote it for; he was the ideal collaborator, suppressing neither himself nor the poet at

his side. Lawes, in fact, seems to have been an excellent friend to Milton. He had commissioned him to write *Arcades* for the Countess Dowager of Derby, at whose country-seat it was performed by young persons of her family; and now again Milton was indebted to Lawes for the privilege of writing a masque, this time for the countess's son-in-law, the Earl of Bridgewater, on the occasion of his becoming Lord President of Wales. A masque could be any kind of dramatic entertainment so long as it suited itself to the situation that called it forth; but usually it was allegorical and spectacular, with interspersed songs and dances. At Ludlow Castle the parts of the Lady and her two brothers were played by three children of the earl, and the part of Thyrsis the Attendant Spirit by Lawes himself. It is not known whether Milton was present; but it is clear that the scene of *Comus* was the forest surrounding Ludlow Castle, and the story was of how the earl's children, lost in this forest, at last returned home safe to their parents.

It was the songs that Lawes set to music, and the combined result, as has been said, is beautiful. But the drama they punctuate has its own great claims upon our interest, so that it would be a pity to suppose it secondary. To Milton, surely, it was the main thing he had done; he had lavished as much care upon the blank verse of its dialogue as he had upon the shorter lines of the lyrics; and he would have been sorry to hear that any of the ideas he sought to express were ever to be ignored or taken for granted. They were ideas about virtue and grace, two matters upon which

he had meditated profoundly, and his little drama showed how he thought these matters might be thought about by others.

Hope, Faith, and Chastity; and the greatest of these, a passage in *Comus* seems to say, is Chastity. The story is of how a lady, lost from her brothers in a wood, is threatened by the son of Bacchus and Circe with the more serious loss of her virginity; and of how by supernatural means she is saved. Milton has been accused of writing in *Comus* a parable of prudery; but to say such a thing is to miss the fact that it is truly a drama, and furthermore to miss the signs in it that its author disapproves of prudery quite as much as he disapproves of sensuality. It is no longer the fashion, as it was in the seventeenth century, to conceive of chastity as the very type and symbol of human perfection, and therefore as realizable only in heaven. Those who thought they were perfect on earth committed the sin of pride; and those who thought they understood perfection, in others or in themselves, might well fall short of the truth, which in its fullest form was of mystical magnitude—a high doctrine which the ironies of drama might best elucidate. So Milton believed at any rate; and hence he proceeded to bury his vision deep among the particulars of a play none of whose characters ever speaks for him. The Elder Brother thinks he knows, and does not; he speaks like a prig, and Milton intends that we should note the fact. Even the Lady, who is not a prig, fails nevertheless to answer the arguments of Comus as he attempts to seduce her into drinking from his glass; Comus has no

comprehension of chastity at all, but neither does she have perfect comprehension; she identifies it, perhaps, with her own virtue; whereas it is a heavenly thing whose name is grace, and it is as much beyond her reach as salvation is beyond her power; in the end she is rescued by forces and persons that have nothing to do with this world. And Milton, together with the audience if its subtlety is sufficient, alone sees where truth lies. It lies before the starry threshold of Jove's court, or in the Garden of Adonis, or—if we prefer Christian to pagan symbols—in Heaven itself, whose solemn troops and sweet societies might sing it to us were our ears attuned and our intellects attentive.

It would be folly to assert that *Comus* is great drama; no one ever thought of it as such. But it is drama, with persons in it rather than abstractions. Comus and the Lady submit their cases to a genuine court; the trial of each is real, and neither wins by his own effort; the presentation, that is to say, is nothing if not dramatic. The masque, however, is lyric too, as masques were expected to be. Sir Henry Wotton still speaks for us when he praises the songs, which no one has ever presumed to defend or explain. The drama requires commentary, but Sabrina is as clear and sweet as the water of which her person is somehow composed. Milton at twenty-six was not yet the epic poet of *Paradise Lost* or the dramatic genius of *Samson Agonistes*. He was only a young man, writing minor poems in his father's house. But they are masterpieces too, and by no means the least of them is *Comus*.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

There are five texts of *Comus*, as follows:

1. A manuscript at Trinity College, Cambridge, in Milton's own hand.

2. The Bridgewater manuscript, in the hand of a copyist, but containing stage directions by Henry Lawes, who wrote the musical accompaniment and supervised the production. This manuscript has been at Bridgewater House, where the masque was first enacted, ever since the original production in 1634.

3. The first printed (anonymous) edition of 1637, put out by Lawes, with Milton's consent, because, in Lawes's words, 'the often Copying of it hath tir'd my Pen'. The masque, Lawes declares, has not been 'openly acknowledg'd by the Author, yet it is legitimate off-spring'.

4. Milton's *Poems* of 1645, containing the first publication of *Comus* under Milton's name. It embodies considerable alterations and extensive additions.

5. The 1673 edition of Milton's minor poems, the last to be published during his life. The changes between this and the 1645 edition are trifling. *This definitive text, of 1673, with the spelling modernized, is used in the present edition.*

COMUS

A MASQUE PRESENTED AT LUDLOW CASTLE 1634

BEFORE

JOHN, EARL OF BRIDGEWATER

THEN PRESIDENT OF WALES

THE PERSONS

THE ATTENDANT SPIRIT,
afterwards in the habit of Thyrsis

COMUS, with his Crew

THE LADY

FIRST BROTHER

SECOND BROTHER

SABRINA, the Nymph, with Attendants

COMUS

The first Scene discovers a wild wood. The Attendant Spirit descends or enters

Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aerial spirits live insphered
In regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confined, and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives
After this mortal change, to her true servants
Amongst the enthronèd gods on sainted seats.
Yet some there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key
That opes the palace of eternity:
To such my errand is, and but for such,
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds,
With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould.
But to my task. Neptune, besides the sway
Of every salt flood, and each ebbing stream,
Took in by lot 'twixt high and nether Jove,
Imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles
That like to rich and various gems inlay
The unadornèd bosom of the deep,

Which he to grace his tributary gods
By course commits to several government,
And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns,
And wield their little tridents. But this isle,
The greatest and the best of all the main,
He quarters to his blue-haired deities,
And all this tract that fronts the falling sun
A noble peer of mickle trust and power
Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide
An old and haughty nation proud in arms:
Where his fair offspring nursed in princely lore,
Are coming to attend their father's state,
And new-entrusted sceptre. But their way
Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,
The nodding horror of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger.
And here their tender age might suffer peril,
But that by quick command from sovereign Jove
I was dispatched for their defence, and guard;
And listen why, for I will tell ye now
What never yet was heard in tale or song
From old or modern bard in hall or bower.
Bacchus that first from out the purple grape
Crushed the sweet poison of misusèd wine,
After the Tuscan mariners transformed
Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed,
On Circe's island fell. (Who knows not Circe,
The daughter of the Sun? whose charmèd cup
Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape,

Circe, the daughter of the Sun

And downward fell into a grovelling swine.)
This Nymph that gazed upon his clustering locks,
With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth,
Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son
Much like his father, but his mother more,
Whom therefore she brought up and Comus named,
Who ripe, and frolic of his full-grown age,
Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields,
At last betakes him to this ominous wood,
And in thick shelter of black shades embowered,
Excels his mother at her mighty art,
Offering to every weary traveller
His orient liquor in a crystal glass,
To quench the drouth of Phœbus, which as they taste
(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst)
Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,
Th' express resemblance of the gods, is changed
Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,
Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
All other parts remaining as they were,
And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before;
And all their friends, and native home forget
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.
Therefore when any favoured of high Jove
Chances to pass through this adventurous glade,
Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star,
I shoot from Heaven to give him safe convoy,

As now I do: but first I must put off
These my sky-robes spun out of Iris' woof,
And take the weeds and likeness of a swain,
That to the service of this house belongs,
Who with his soft pipe, and smooth-dittied song,
Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
And hush the waving woods, nor of less faith,
And in this office of his mountain watch
Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid
Of this occasion. But I hear the tread
Of hateful steps, I must be viewless now.

Comus enters with a charming-rod in one hand, his glass in the other; with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistering, they come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.

Comus. The star that bids the shepherd fold
Now the top of heaven doth hold,
And the gilded car of day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream,
And the slope sun his upward beam
Shoots against the dusky pole,
Pacing toward the other goal
Of his chamber in the East.
Meanwhile welcome joy, and feast,
Midnight shout, and revelry,
Tipsy dance, and jollity.
Braid your locks with rosy twine,
Dropping odours, dropping wine.

Rigour now is gone to bed,
And advice with scrupulous head,
Strict age, and sour severity,
With their grave saws in slumber lie.
We that are of purer fire
Imitate the starry choir,
Who in their nightly watchful spheres
Lead in swift round the months and years.
The sounds, and seas with all their finny drove
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move,
And on the tawny sands and shelves,
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
By dimpled brook, and fountain brim,
The wood-nymphs decked with daisies trim,
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:
What hath night to do with sleep?
Night hath better sweets to prove,
Venus now wakes, and wakens love.
Come, let us our rites begin,
'Tis only daylight that makes sin,
Which these dun shades will ne'er report.
Hail, Goddess of nocturnal sport,
Dark veil'd Cotytto, t' whom the secret flame
Of midnight torches burns; mysterious dame
That ne'er art called, but when the dragon womb
Of Stygian darkness spits her thickest gloom,
And makes one blot of all the air,
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,
Wherein thou rid'st with Hecat', and befriend

Us thy vow'd priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out,
Ere the blabbing eastern scout,
The nice morn on the Indian steep,
From her cabined loophole peep,
And to the tell-tale sun descry
Our concealed solemnity.
Come, knit hands, and beat the ground,
In a light fantastic round.

THE MEASURE

Break off, break off, I feel the different pace
Of some chaste footing near about this ground.
Run to your shrouds, within these brakes and trees,
Our number may affright: some virgin sure
(For so I can distinguish by mine art)
Benighted in these woods. Now to my charms,
And to my wily trains; I shall ere long
Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed
About my mother Circe. Thus I hurl
My dazzling spells into the spongy air,
Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
And give it false presentments, lest the place
And my quaint habits breed astonishment,
And put the damsel to suspicious flight,
Which must not be, for that's against my course;
I under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy
Baited with reasons not unplausible,

Wind me into the easy-hearted man,
And hug him into snares. When once her eye
Hath met the virtue of this magic dust,
I shall appear some harmless villager
Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.
But here she comes, I fairly step aside,
And hearken, if I may, her business here.

The Lady enters

Lady. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,
My best guide now, methought it was the sound
Of riot, and ill-managed merriment,
Such as the jocund flute, or gamesome pipe
Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,
When for their teeming flocks, and granges full
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
And thank the gods amiss. I should be loth
To meet the rudeness, and swilled insolence
Of such late wassailers; yet O where else
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet
In the blind mazes of this tangled wood?
My brothers when they saw me wearied out
With this long way, resolving here to lodge
Under the spreading favour of these pines,
Stept, as they said, to the next thicket side
To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit
As the kind hospitable woods provide.
They left me then, when the gray-hooded ev'n,
Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed

Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain.
But where they are, and why they came not back,
Is now the labour of my thoughts, 'tis likeliest
They had engaged their wandering steps too far,
And envious darkness, ere they could return,
Had stolen them from me; else, O thievish night,
Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars,
That nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps
With everlasting oil, to give due light
To the misled and lonely traveller?
This is the place, as well as I may guess,
Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear,
Yet nought but single darkness do I find.
What might this be? A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,
And airy tongues, that syllable men's names
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.
These thoughts may startle well, but not astound,
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion, Conscience.—
O welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,
And thou unblemished form of Chastity!
I see ye visibly, and now believe
That he, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,

Would send a glistering guardian, if need were,
To keep my life and honour unassailed.
Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
I did not err, there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.
I cannot halloo to my brothers, but
Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
I'll venture, for my new-enlivened spirits
Prompt me; and they perhaps are not far off.

SONG

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen
Within thy airy shell
By slow Meander's margent green;
And in the violet-embroidered vale,
Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
That likest thy Narcissus are?
O if thou have
Hid them in some flowery cave,
Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parley, daughter of the sphere,
So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all heaven's harmonies.

Comus. Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?

Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence;
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night
At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of Darkness till it smiled: I have oft heard
My mother Circe with the Sirens three,
Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades
Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs,
Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul
And lap it in Elysium, Scylla wept,
And chid her barking waves into attention,
And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause:
Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense,
And in sweet madness robbed it of itself,
But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her
And she shall be my queen. Hail, foreign wonder
Whom certain these rough shades did never breed
Unless the goddess that in rural shrine
Dwell'st here with Pan, or Sylvan, by blest song
Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog
To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood.
Lady. Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise
That is addressed to unattending ears,
Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift
How to regain my severed company

Midnight shout, and revelry

Compelled me to awake the courteous Echo
To give me answer from her mossy couch.
Comus. What chance, good lady, hath bereft you thus?
Lady. Dim darkness, and this leafy labyrinth.
Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?
Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf.
Comus. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?
Lady. To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.
Comus. And left your fair side all unguarded, lady?
Lady. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.
Comus. Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.
Lady. How easy my misfortune is to hit!
Comus. Imports their loss, beside the present need?
Lady. No less than if I should my brothers lose.
Comus. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?
Lady. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips.
Comus. Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came,
And the swinked hedger at his supper sate;
I saw them under a green mantling vine
That crawls along the side of yon small hill,
Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots,
Their port was more than human, as they stood;
I took it for a faëry vision
Of some gay creatures of the element
That in the colours of the rainbow live
And play i' the plighted clouds. I was awestruck,

And as I passed, I worshipped: if those you seek
It were a journey like the path to Heav'n,
To help you find them.

Lady. Gentle villager,
What readiest way would bring me to that place?

Comus. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

Lady. To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,
In such a scant allowance of star-light,
Would overtask the best land-pilot's art,
Without the sure guess of well-practised feet.

Comus. I know each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell of this wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood,
And if your stray attendance be yet lodged,
Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark
From her thatched pallet rouse, if otherwise
I can conduct you, lady, to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest.

Lady. Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest-offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
With smoky rafters, than in tap'stry halls
In courts of princes, where it first was named,
And yet is most pretended: in a place
Less warranted than this, or less secure
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.

Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportioned strength. Shepherd, lead on.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter the Two Brothers

Elder Brother. Unmuffle, ye faint stars, and thou, fair Moon,
That wont'st to love the traveller's benison,
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,
And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here
In double night of darkness, and of shades;
Or if your influence be quite dammed up
With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,
Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole
Of some clay habitation, visit us
With thy long levelled rule of streaming light,
And thou shalt be our star of Arcady,
Or Tyrian cynosure.

Second Brother. Or if our eyes
Be barred that happiness, might we but hear
The folded flocks penned in their wattled cotes,
Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,
Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock
Count the night watches to his feathery dames,
'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering
In this close dungeon of innumerous boughs.
But O that hapless virgin our lost sister!
Where may she wander now, whither betake her
From the chill dew, among rude burs and thistles?
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm

Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.
What if in wild amazement, and affright,
Or while we speak within the direful grasp
Of savage hunger, or of savage heat?
Elder Brother. Peace, brother, be not over-exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;
For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
What need a man forestall his date of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid?
Or if they be but false alarms of fear,
How bitter is such self-delusion!
I do not think my sister so to seek,
Or so unprincipled in virtue's book,
And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,
As that the single want of light and noise
(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not),
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,
And put them into misbecoming plight.
Virtue could see to do what virtue would
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self
Oft seeks to sweet retirèd solitude,
Where with her best nurse Contemplation
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all to-ruffled and sometimes impaired.
He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day,
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts

the blind mazes of this tangled wood

Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.

Second Brother. 'Tis most true
That musing meditation most affects
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,
Far from the cheerful haunt of men, and herds,
And sits as safe as in a senate-house,
For who would rob a hermit of his weeds,
His few books, or his beads, or maple dish,
Or do his gray hairs any violence?
But beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree
Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
Of dragon watch with unenchanted eye,
To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit
From the rash hand of bold incontinence.
You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps
Of misers' treasure by an outlaw's den,
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
Danger will wink on opportunity,
And let a single helpless maiden pass
Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.
Of night or loneliness it recks me not,
I fear the dread events that dog them both,
Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person
Of our unownèd sister.

Elder Brother. I do not, brother,
Infer, as if I thought my sister's state
Secure without all doubt, or controversy:
Yet where an equal poise of hope and fear

Does arbitrate th' event, my nature is
That I incline to hope, rather than fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion.
My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine, she has a hidden strength
Which you remember not.
Second Brother. What hidden strength,
Unless the strength of heaven, if you mean that?
Elder Brother. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength
Which if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own:
'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity:
She that has that, is clad in complete steel,
And like a quivered nymph with arrows keen
May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,
Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds,
Where, through the sacred rays of chastity,
No savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer
Will dare to soil her virgin purity,
Yea there, where very desolation dwells
By grots, and caverns shagged with horrid shades,
She may pass on with unblenched majesty,
Be it not done in pride, or in presumption.
Some say, no evil thing that walks by night
In fog, or fire, by lake, or moorish fen,
Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,
That breaks his magic chains at curfew-time,
No goblin, or swart faëry of the mine,
Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.
Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call

Antiquity from the old schools of Greece
To testify the arms of chastity?
Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,
Fair silver-shafted queen for ever chaste,
Wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness
And spotted mountain pard, but set at naught
The frivolous bolt of Cupid; gods and men
Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods.
What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield
That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,
Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone?
But rigid looks of chaste austerity,
And noble grace that dashed brute violence
With sudden adoration, and blank awe.
So dear to heaven is saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream, and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal: but when lust
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,

Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being.
Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp
Oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres
Lingering, and sitting by a new-made grave,
As loth to leave the body that it loved,
And linked itself by carnal sensualty
To a degenerate and degraded state.

Second Brother. How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbèd as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.

Elder Brother. List, list, I hear
Some far off halloo break the silent air.

Second Brother. Methought so too; what should it be?

Elder Brother. For certain
Either some one like us night-foundered here,
Or else some neighbour woodman, or at worst,
Some roving robber calling to his fellows.

Second Brother. Heaven keep my sister! Again, again, and near,
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

Elder Brother. I'll halloo,
If he be friendly he comes well; if not,
Defence is a good cause, and Heaven be for us.

Enter the Attendant Spirit, habited like a shepherd

That halloo I should know, what are you? speak;
Come not too near, you fall on iron stakes else.

Spirit. What voice is that? my young lord? speak again.
Second Brother. O brother, 'tis my father's shepherd, sure.
Elder Brother. Thyrsis? Whose artful strains have oft delayed
The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
And sweetened every muskrose of the dale,
How cam'st thou here, good swain? hath any ram
Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,
Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?
How could'st thou find this dark sequestered nook?
Spirit. O my loved master's heir, and his next joy,
I came not here on such a trivial toy
As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth
Of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth
That doth enrich these downs, is worth a thought
To this my errand, and the care it brought.
But O my virgin lady, where is she?
How chance she is not in your company?
Elder Brother. To tell thee sadly, shepherd, without blame,
Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.
Spirit. Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.
Elder Brother. What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly
show.
Spirit. I'll tell ye, 'tis not vain, or fabulous,
(Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance)
What the sage poets, taught by th' heavenly Muse,
Storied of old in high immortal verse
Of dire chimeras and enchanted isles,
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to hell,
For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navel of this hideous wood,
Immured in cypress shades a sorcerer dwells
Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,
Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries,
And here to every thirsty wanderer
By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,
With many murmurs mixed; whose pleasing poison
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
And the inglorious likeness of a beast
Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage,
Charactered in the face; this have I learnt
Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts,
That brow this bottom glade, whence night by night
He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl
Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,
Doing abhorrèd rites to Hecate
In their obscurèd haunts of inmost bowers,
Yet have they many baits, and guileful spells
To inveigle and invite th' unwary sense
Of them that pass unweeting by the way.
This evening late by then the chewing flocks
Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb
Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold,
I sat me down to watch upon a bank
With ivy canopied, and interwove
With flaunting honeysuckle, and began
Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy
To meditate my rural minstrelsy,
Till fancy had her fill, but ere a close

The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,
And filled the air with barbarous dissonance,
At which I ceased, and listened them awhile,
Till an unusual stop of sudden silence
Gave respite to the drowsy frighted steeds
That draw the litter of close-curtained sleep.
At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,
And stole upon the air, that even Silence
Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might
Deny her nature, and be never more
Still to be so displaced. I was all ear,
And took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of Death; but O ere long
Too well I did perceive it was the voice
Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister.
Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear,
And 'O poor hapless nightingale', thought I,
'How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare!'
Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste
Through paths, and turnings often trod by day,
Till guided by mine ear I found the place
Where that damned wizard hid in sly disguise
(For so by certain signs I knew) had met
Already, ere my best speed could prevent,
The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey,
Who gently asked if he had seen such two,
Supposing him some neighbour villager;
Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed

Ye were the two she meant, with that I sprung
Into swift flight, till I had found you here,
But further know I not.

Second Brother. O night and shades,
How are ye join'd with hell in triple knot
Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin
Alone, and helpless! Is this the confidence
You gave me, brother?

Elder Brother. Yes, and keep it still;
Lean on it safely, not a period
Shall be unsaid for me: against the threats
Of malice or of sorcery, or that power
Which erring men call chance, this I hold firm,
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled;
Yea even that which mischief meant most harm
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
But evil on itself shall back recoil,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last
Gathered like scum, and settled to itself
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed, and self-consumèd; if this fail,
The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on.
Against the opposing will and arm of heaven
May never this just sword be lifted up;
But for that damned magician, let him be girt
With all the grisly legions that troop
Under the sooty flag of Acheron,

beauty . . . had need the guard of dragon-watch

Harpies and hydras, or all the monstrous forms
'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out,
And force him to return his purchase back,
Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,
Cursed as his life.

Spirit. Alas! good vent'rous youth,
I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise,
But here thy sword can do thee little stead,
Far other arms, and other weapons must
Be those that quell the might of hellish charms,
He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,
And crumble all thy sinews.

Elder Brother. Why prithee, shepherd,
How durst thou then thyself approach so near
As to make this relation?

Spirit. Care and utmost shifts
How to secure the lady from surprisal
Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad
Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled
In every virtuous plant and healing herb
That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray,
He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing,
Which when I did, he on the tender grass
Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,
And in requital ope his leathern scrip,
And show me simples of a thousand names,
Telling their strange and vigorous faculties;
Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
But of divine effect, he culled me out;

The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
But in another country, as he said,
Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil:
Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain
Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon,
And yet more med'cinal is it than that moly
That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave;
He called it hæmony, and gave it me,
And bade me keep it as of sovereign use
'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp,
Or ghastly furies' apparition;
I pursed it up, but little reckoning made,
Till now that this extremity compelled,
But now I find it true; for by this means
I knew the foul enchanter though disguised,
Entered the very lime-twigs of his spells,
And yet came off: if you have this about you
(As I will give you when we go) you may
Boldly assault the necromancer's hall;
Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood,
And brandished blade rush on him, break his glass,
And shed the luscious liquor on the ground,
But seize his wand, though he and his cursed crew
Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,
Or like the sons of Vulcan vomit smoke,
Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

Elder Brother. Thyrsis, lead on apace, I'll follow
thee,
And some good angel bear a shield before us.

The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness; soft music, tables spread with all dainties. Comus appears with his rabble, and the Lady set in an enchanted chair, to whom he offers his glass, which she puts by, and goes about to rise.

Comus. Nay, lady, sit; if I but wave this wand,
Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster,
And you a statue; or as Daphne was
Rootbound, that fled Apollo.
Lady. Fool, do not boast,
Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind
With all thy charms, although this corporal rind
Thou hast immanacled, while heaven sees good.
Comus. Why are you vexed, lady? why do you frown?
Here dwell no frowns, nor anger, from these gates
Sorrow flies far. See, here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns
Brisk as the April buds in primrose-season.
And first behold this cordial julep here,
That flames and dances in his crystal bounds
With spirits of balm, and fragrant syrups mixed.
Not that Nepenthes which the wife of Thone
In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena
Is of such power to stir up joy as this,
To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst.
Why should you be so cruel to yourself,
And to those dainty limbs which Nature lent
For gentle usage, and soft delicacy?
But you invert the covenants of her trust,

And harshly deal like an ill borrower
With that which you received on other terms,
Scorning the unexempt condition
By which all mortal frailty must subsist,
Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,
That have been tired all day without repast,
And timely rest have wanted, but, fair virgin,
This will restore all soon.

Lady. 'Twill not, false traitor,
'Twill not restore the truth and honesty
That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies,
Was this the cottage, and the safe abode
Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,
These ugly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me!
Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver,
Hast thou betrayed my credulous innocence
With visored falsehood, and base forgery,
And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here
With lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute?
Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets,
I would not taste thy treasonous offer; none
But such as are good men can give good things;
And that which is not good is not delicious
To a well-governed and wise appetite.

Comus. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears
To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,
And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,
Praising the lean and sallow abstinence.
Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth,

With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,
Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,
But all to please and sate the curious taste?
And set to work millions of spinning worms,
That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk
To deck her sons, and that no corner might
Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
She hutched the all-worshipped ore and precious gems
To store her children with; if all the world
Should in a pet of temperance feed on pulse,
Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,
The All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,
Not half his riches known, and yet despised,
And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth,
And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,
Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,
And strangled with her waste fertility;
Th' earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with
plumes,
The herds would over-multitude their lords,
The sea o'erfraught would swell, and the unsought
diamonds
Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,
And so bestud with stars, that they below
Would grow inured to light, and come at last
To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.
List, lady, be not coy, and be not cozened

With that same vaunted name virginity,
Beauty is nature's coin, must not be hoarded,
But must be current, and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
Unsavoury in th' enjoyment of itself;
If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languished head.
Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities
Where most may wonder at the workmanship;
It is for homely features to keep home,
They had their name thence; coarse complexions
And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.
What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn?
There was another meaning in these gifts,
Think what, and be advised, you are but young yet.
Lady. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler
Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.
I hate when vice can bolt her arguments,
And virtue has no tongue to check her pride:
Imposter, do not charge most innocent nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance, she, good cateress,
Means her provision only to the good
That live according to her sober laws,

And holy dictate of spare temperance:
If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly pampered luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature's full blessings would be well dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportion,
And she no whit encumbered with her store,
And then the Giver would be better thanked,
His praise due paid, for swinish gluttony
Ne'er looks to heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,
But with besotted base ingratitude
Crams, and blasphemes his feeder. Shall I go on?
Or have I said enow? To him that dares
Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
Against the sun-clad power of chastity,
Fain would I something say, yet to what end?
Thou hast nor ear nor soul to apprehend
The sublime notion and high mystery
That must be uttered to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of virginity;
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
More happiness than this thy present lot.
Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric
That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence,
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced;
Yet should I try, the uncontrollèd worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence

That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
And the brute earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
Till all thy magic structures reared so high,
Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.

Comus. She fables not, I feel that I do fear
Her words set off by some superior power;
And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew
Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove
Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus
To some of Saturn's crew. I must dissemble,
And try her yet more strongly. Come, no more,
This is mere moral babble, and direct
Against the canon laws of our foundation;
I must not suffer this, yet 'tis but the lees
And settlings of a melancholy blood;
But this will cure all straight, one sip of this
Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight
Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.

The Brothers rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground; his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in; the Attendant Spirit comes in.

Spirit. What, have you let the false enchanter scape?
O ye mistook, ye should have snatched his wand
And bound him fast; without his rod reversed
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixed and motionless;
Yet stay, be not disturbed, now I bethink me,
Some other means I have which may be used,

behold this cordial julep

Which once of Melibœus old I learnt,
The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.
There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,
That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream,
Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure,
Whilom she was the daughter of Locrine,
That had the sceptre from his father Brute.
The guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit
Of her enragèd stepdame Guendolen,
Commended her fair innocence to the flood
That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course.
The water-nymphs that in the bottom played
Held up their pearlèd wrists and took her in,
Bearing her straight to aged Nereus' hall,
Who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head,
And gave her to his daughters to imbathe
In nectared lavers strewed with asphodel,
And through the porch and inlet of each sense
Dropt in ambrosial oils till she reviv'd,
And underwent a quick immortal change
Made goddess of the river; still she retains
Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs
That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,
Which she with precious vialed liquors heals.
For which the shepherds at their festivals
Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,
And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream

Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.
And, as the old swain said, she can unlock
The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,
If she be right invoked in warbled song,
For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift
To aid a virgin such as was herself
In hard-besetting need; this will I try
And add the power of some adjuring verse.

SONG

Sabrina fair,
  Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
  In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair,
  Listen for dear honour's sake,
  Goddess of the silver lake,
    Listen and save.
Listen and appear to us
In name of great Oceanus,
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace,
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
And the Carpathian wizard's hook,
By scaly Triton's winding shell,
And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell,
By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands,
By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,

And the songs of Sirens sweet,
By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,
And fair Ligea's golden comb,
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks
Sleeking her soft alluring locks,
By all the nymphs that nightly dance
Upon thy streams with wily glance,
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head
From thy coral-paven bed,
And bridle in thy headlong wave,
Till thou our summons answered have.
Listen and save.

Sabrina rises, attended by Water Nymphs, and sings

By the rushy-fringèd bank,
Where grows the willow and the osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays,
Thick-set with agate, and the azure sheen
Of turquoise blue, and em'rald green
That in the channel strays,
Whilst from off the waters fleet
Thus I set my printless feet
O'er the cowslip's velvet head,
That bends not as I tread,
Gentle swain, at thy request
I am here.

Spirit. Goddess dear,
We implore thy powerful hand
To undo the charmèd band

Of true virgin here distressed,
Through the force and through the wile
Of unblessed enchanter vile.

Sabrina. Shepherd, 'tis my office best
To help ensnarèd chastity;
Brightest lady, look on me,
Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops that from my fountain pure
I have kept of precious cure,
Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip,
Next this marble venomed seat
Smeared with gums of glutinous heat
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold,
Now the spell hath lost his hold;
And I must haste ere morning hour
To wait in Amphitrite's bower.

Sabrina descends, and the Lady rises out of her seat

Spirit. Virgin, daughter of Locrine,
Sprung of old Anchises' line,
May thy brimmèd waves for this
Their full tribute never miss
From a thousand petty rills
That tumble down the snowy hills;
Summer drouth, or singèd air
Never scorch thy tresses fair,
Nor wet October's torrent flood
Thy molten crystal fill with mud;

May thy billows roll ashore
The beryl and the golden ore;
May thy lofty head be crowned
With many a tower and terrace round,
And here and there thy banks upon
With groves of myrrh, and cinnamon.
Come, lady, while heaven lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursèd place
Lest the sorcerer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a waste or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground;
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide,
And not many furlongs thence
Is your father's residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wished presence; and beside
All the swains that there abide
With jigs and rural dance resort;
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer;
Come let us haste, the stars grow high,
But night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow town and the President's castle; then come in country dancers, after them the Attendant Spirit, with the Two Brothers, and the Lady.

SONG

Spirit. Back, Shepherds, back, enough your play,
Till next sunshine holiday;
Here be without duck or nod
Other trippings to be trod
Of lighter toes, and such court guise
As Mercury did first devise
With the mincing Dryades
On the lawns, and on the leas.

This second song presents them to their Father and Mother

Noble lord, and lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight;
Here behold so goodly grown
Three fair branches of your own;
Heaven hath timely tried their youth,
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
And sent them here through hard assays
With a crown of deathless praise
To triumph in victorious dance
O'er sensual Folly, and Intemperance.

The dances ended, the Spirit epilogizes

Spirit. To the ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky:
There I suck the liquid air
All amidst the gardens fair
Of Hesperus, and his daughters three

That sing about the golden tree:
Along the crispèd shades and bowers
Revels the spruce and jocund Spring;
The Graces, and the rosy-bosomed hours,
Thither all their bounties bring;
There eternal summer dwells,
And west winds with musky wing
About the cedarn alleys fling
Nard, and cassia's balmy smells.
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the odorous banks that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purfled scarf can show,
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List, mortals, if your ears be true)
Beds of hyacinth, and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound
In slumber soft; and on the ground
Sadly sits the Assyrian queen;
But far above in spangled sheen
Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced,
Holds his dear Psyche sweet entranced
After her wandering labours long,
Till free consent the gods among
Make her his eternal bride,
And from her fair unspotted side
Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy; so Jove hath sworn.

But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.
Mortals that would follow me,
Love virtue, she alone is free,
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or if virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

THE MASQUE OF COMUS

THE AIRS OF THE SONGS BY HENRY LAWES WITH HIS VERSION OF THE WORDS

PREFACE

BY HUBERT J. FOSS

HENRY LAWES was forty-nine years of age and Milton twenty-six when, in Peck's words, Lawes 'pitched on him to compose the Masque'. Lawes was at the top of the tree in his profession, the most prominent musician and composer of his day. Peck (*New Memoirs of Milton*, 1740) alleges that he taught Milton music. Certainly Lawes taught the Bridgewater family, and, as a gentleman of the Chapel Royal, was 'a servant of King Charles I'. But just as Milton had a great love for music, so had Lawes a great love for poetry. He selected the verses for his settings carefully and with judgement. He set to music words by Ben Jonson, Davenant, Waller, Herrick, Carew, Lovelace, and Cartwright. Besides Milton, Herrick wrote about him, and Waller, of one of whose poems Lawes had made a song in 1635 (the year after *Comus*), wrote a eulogy of him which was published in the composer's volume *Ayres and Dialogues* in 1653. I quote some lines:

> You, by the help of tune, and time,
> Can make that song, which was but rhyme:
> Noy pleading, no man doubts the cause;
> Or questions verses set by Lawes.

* * *

But you alone may truly boast
That not a syllable is lost.

* * *

Let words, and sense, be set by thee.

These passages (divided in the original poem) show clearly that Lawes's declamatory style was appreciated by the living poets.

As a pupil of John Cooper (self-styled Coprario), Lawes must have come into touch with the *Nuove Musiche* movement which centred around Monteverdi. The new ideals suited his literary muse, and his manner of life as an occasional musician emphasized that natural trend for writing music in speech style which was later to come to fruition in Purcell. Lawes was hardly an innovator, but he made a progressive contribution to music in adapting the free rhythms of the madrigalists to the more set and barred rhythms of the operatic style which was then coming in. He wanted to set 'words with just note and accent', and in this he succeeded.

Dr. Charles Burney was no admirer of Lawes nor was Sir John Hawkins: both print 'Sweet Echo', from the Masque, in their *Histories*; but Burney derides it as 'unmeaning sounds' and 'insipid simplicity' and Hawkins was hardly more polite. The former, however, commended it as at least having 'been set for a single voice, instead of being mangled by the many-headed monster Madrigal'. Burney, then, was alive to the transformation of rhythm which Lawes was making from the manner of the many voices to that of the few. Concerning *Comus* he quoted in

his *History of Music* an elegant compliment addressed to Milton in a letter of 1638 by Sir Henry Wotton (spelt 'Wootton' by Milton): 'I should much commend the tragical [serious] part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Dorique delicacy in your song and odes.' But these words of Wotton apply with much closer fitness to Lawes's music than to Milton's verses. For Lawes, always dramatic in the theatrical sense, was not deep enough to be tragic, yet his lyrical vein carried him to a considerable height in 'Sweet Echo'—in my opinion a very beautiful work, and separated from the other four songs by a great gulf. It was a lean time in English music, but with this song Lawes fattened it. The rest of the songs are of more conventional and historic interest.

There is a significance in the fact that the eminent Mr. Lawes, in the person of Thyrsis or the Attendant Spirit, sang both the songs which he developed by dividing Milton's Epilogue; he appeared at the beginning and the end of the Masque presented at Ludlow Castle. He was the important person, and meant to be thought so by his patrons. In a psychological way comparison may be made here to the omission of Milton's name from the original performance and in Lawes's own published edition of Milton's text in 1637. I am not surprised that Lawes did not print the music in this edition. The purchasing of printed music was not an established practice at the time. Burney suggests that there was more music than has survived under the label of *Comus*—a dance between verses 144 and 145, soft music 'prescribed' before verse 659,

singing by Sabrina, and another song before verse 966. These pieces would have been of a casual nature, and if written down at all, would have been regarded as not worth preserving in autograph or print. There must have been at the period a great corpus of 'light music' from which one could draw or to which one could contribute without any fear of infringing or obtaining rights!

Whatever music there may have been written for or played at the performance, it is certain that only the five songs which are printed in this book exist today in association with the Masque. They do not tally with Milton's text. That text would seem to demand: song 'Sweet Echo', song 'Sabrina Fair', song (after Sabrina rises) 'By the rushy fringed bank', song 'Back, Shepherds, Back', song 'Noble Lord and Lady Bright'. Actually we have the following five songs: 'From the Heavens now I fly' (altered from the line 'To the ocean now I fly', from the Epilogue), 'Sweet Echo', 'Sabrina Fair', 'Back, Shepherds, Back', and second part 'Noble Lord', and 'Now my Task is smoothly done'. As Professor E. J. Dent has said: 'Although Sabrina was invoked "in warbled song", she made her reply without music.' Lawes, poet-lover, clearly made the local circumstances of his production decide what was to be sung and what spoken.

A famous variant comes in here; the Lawes autograph MS. of the music gives, at the end of 'Sweet Echo':

> So maist thou be Transplanted to y^{e} skies
> And hold a Counterpoint to All Heav'ns Harmonies.

The word 'translated', however, occurs in Milton's Cambridge MS. No one knows whether 'transplanted' was a musical emendation by Lawes. But it is quite certain that the Masque as performed at 'Ludlo Castle' (so it appears in both MSS. of the music) was Milton's accepted draft for that occasion, and that all subsequent editions represent his corrections of the first text which was instigated (and no doubt altered) by Lawes.

The music that is printed here follows, as closely as is consistent with sense, what Lawes himself wrote in autograph, signing his work on every page in unmistakable hand. This autograph, whose history is clearly known in its three hundred years of existence, is now the property of the Misses Church of Beaconsfield, by whose courtesy I have been allowed to examine it. It is bound in a volume (about $9\frac{1}{2} \times 15$ inches) together with a number of other Lawes MSS. There is a copy at the British Museum (Add. MSS. 11518) in an unknown hand, which is inaccurate and in places not quite legible, but which is complete, whereas the composer's autograph omits four bars in the bass of the first song. Every known source has been collated with the MSS., except the Mermaid Society's edition of 1904 which was a transcript of the autograph. Rimbault published a very inaccurate version without disclosing a source. For his performance of the work at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1908, Professor Dent had access to the autograph MS. He (like Burney and Hawkins) printed 'Sweet Echo' in the programme, but it is interesting to note the keys of the various transcribers: the original is in D Minor, but

Dent prints it in B Minor, and Bridge in C Minor. The popular edition, published by Novello and Co. Ltd. for the Milton Tercentenary of 1908, was edited by Sir Frederick Bridge, with an introduction by W. Barclay Squire. The musical text, apart from the imaginary interpolations, is not as accurate in detail as one would expect from the prefacer's name, though no doubt he had little to do with the actual printing of the notes, and the arrangement is not wholly in keeping with the style of the composer's period: the keys and bass have been altered considerably.

I give below a note of the points that have had to be considered in preparing this text for the printer:

1. The words of the songs have been transcribed mainly from the British Museum text, after collation with the Lawes text. Ampersands, capitals, and punctuation have been retained, but not the long *ſ*.

2. The ♮ sign does not occur in Lawes or in the British Museum MS. I have kept the ♯ of the original.

3. There is no uniformity in the MSS. in the placing of the ♯ sign. Lawes puts it, without logical reason, alongside a note, above it, or below it, as he feels inclined. I have not followed this but put all ♯ signs alongside the notes.

4. I have kept all the dot and tie signs, however arbitrary.

I append some textual notes on the songs as they appear in the MSS. and as they are printed here:

'FROM THE HEAVENS NOW I FLY'

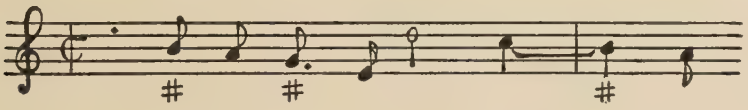
Bar 11. No ♯ or tie appears on the first beat in either MS. It is understood.

For the last four bars there is no bass in the Lawes MS. The bass, as printed here, appears in the British Museum MS.

'SWEET ECHO'

Bar 12. The British Museum MS. is not clear here, but Lawes is quite clear.

Bar 8 from end. The Lawes MS. has a strange barring here:



I have ventured to ignore this in favour of the British Museum MS., Burney and Hawkins.

Last five bars. I have discussed the words above.

'BACK, SHEPHERDS, BACK'

Dramatically it is important to notice that the Lawes MS. has repeat marks at the end of the first part.

Bar 4 from end. There is no ♮ in either the Lawes or the British Museum MS. It is again understood.

'NOW MY TASK IS SMOOTHLY DONE'

The British Museum MS. has no key signature: it makes queer reading without the B♭.

Lawes has a clear B♭ indicative of F Major on each line.

Bar 4. Lawes does not mark a B♮ here. The British Museum MS. having no B♭ in the key signature is not helpful. I think Lawes meant a flat, but may be wrong.

Bar 13. Lawes has no indication of a ♮ to C in the treble part (beat 4).

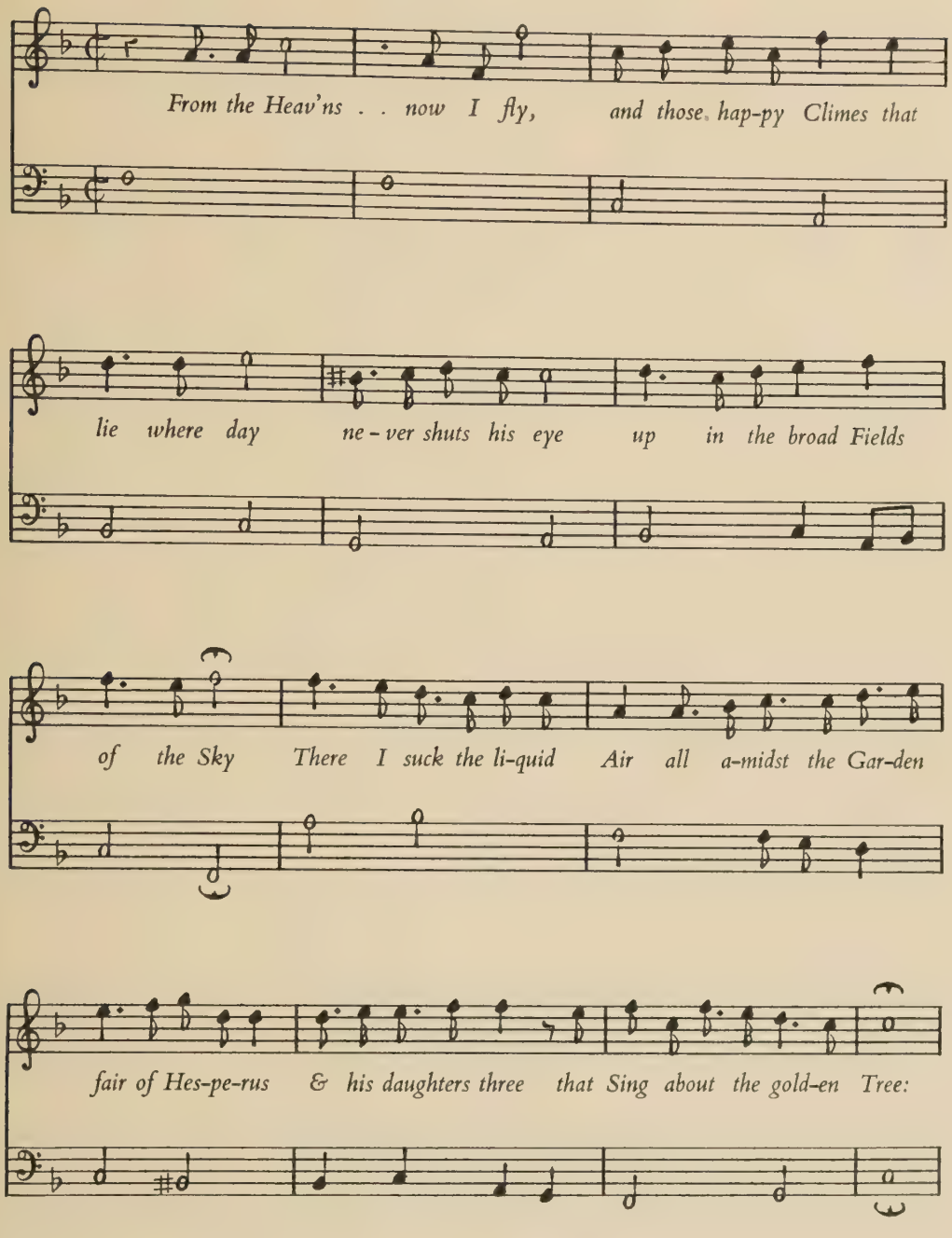
TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
JOHN LORD VISCOUNT BRACKLY
SON AND HEIR APPARENT TO THE
EARL OF BRIDGEWATER
&c

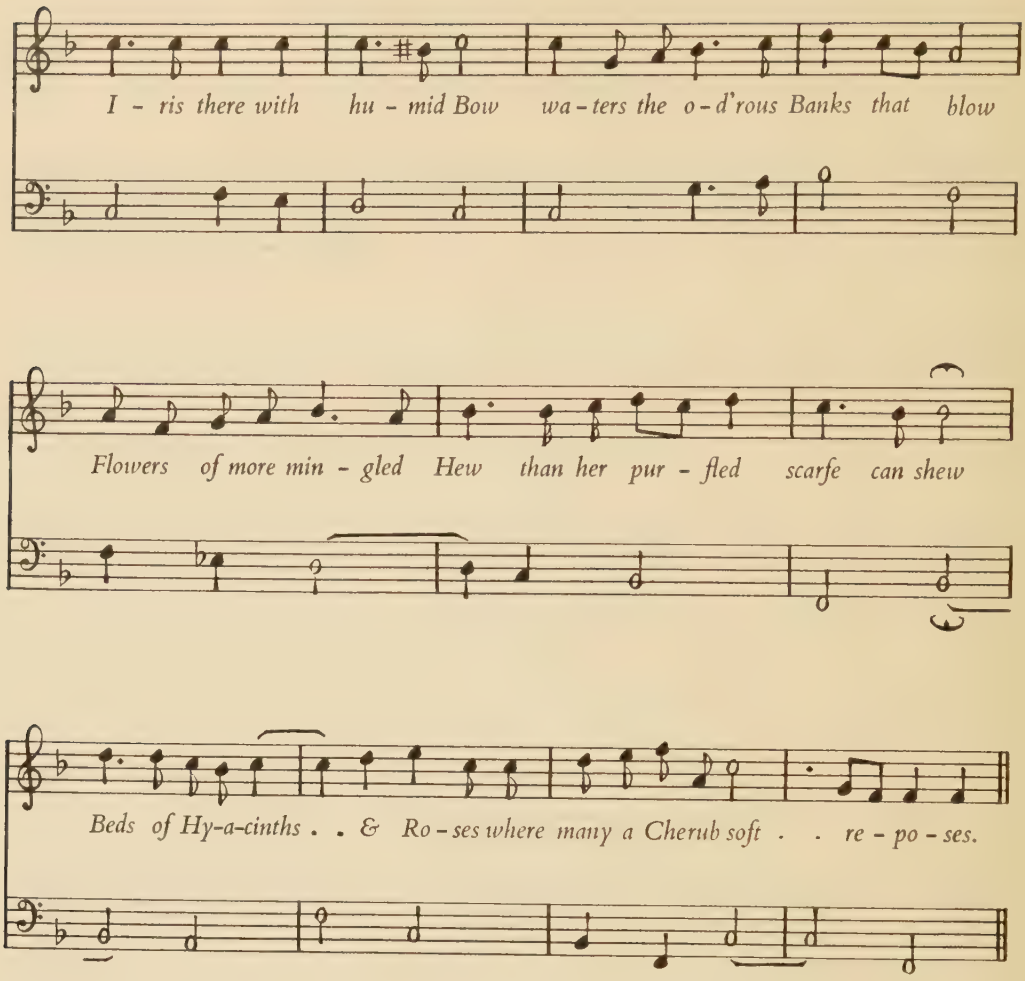
My Lord,

This Poem, which receiv'd its first occasion of Birth from your Self and others of your Noble Family, and much honour from your own Person in the performance, now returns again to make a finall Dedication of itself to you. Although not openly acknowledg'd by the Author, yet it is legitimate offspring, so lovely and so much desired, that the often Copying of it hath tir'd my Pen to give my severall friends satisfaction, and brought me to a necessity of producing it to the publike view and now to offer it up in all rightfull devotion to those fair Hopes, and rare Endowments of your much-promising youth, which give a full assurance, to all that know you, of a future excellence. Live sweet Lord to be the Honour of your Name, and receive this as your own, from the hands of him who hath by many favors been long oblig'd to your most honour'd Parents, and as in this representation your attendant Thyrsis, *so now in all real expression*

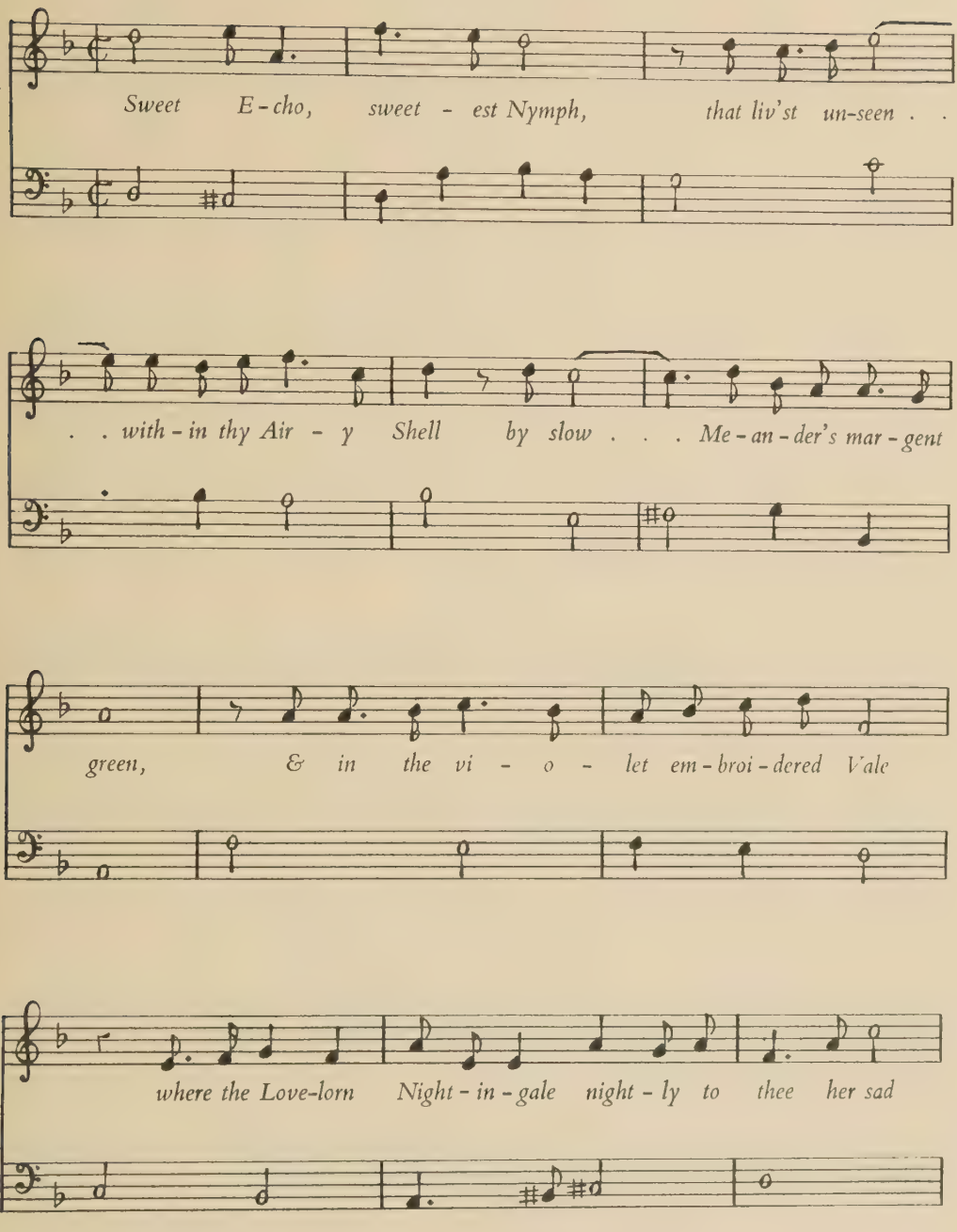
Your faithfull and most
humble Servant
H. LAWES

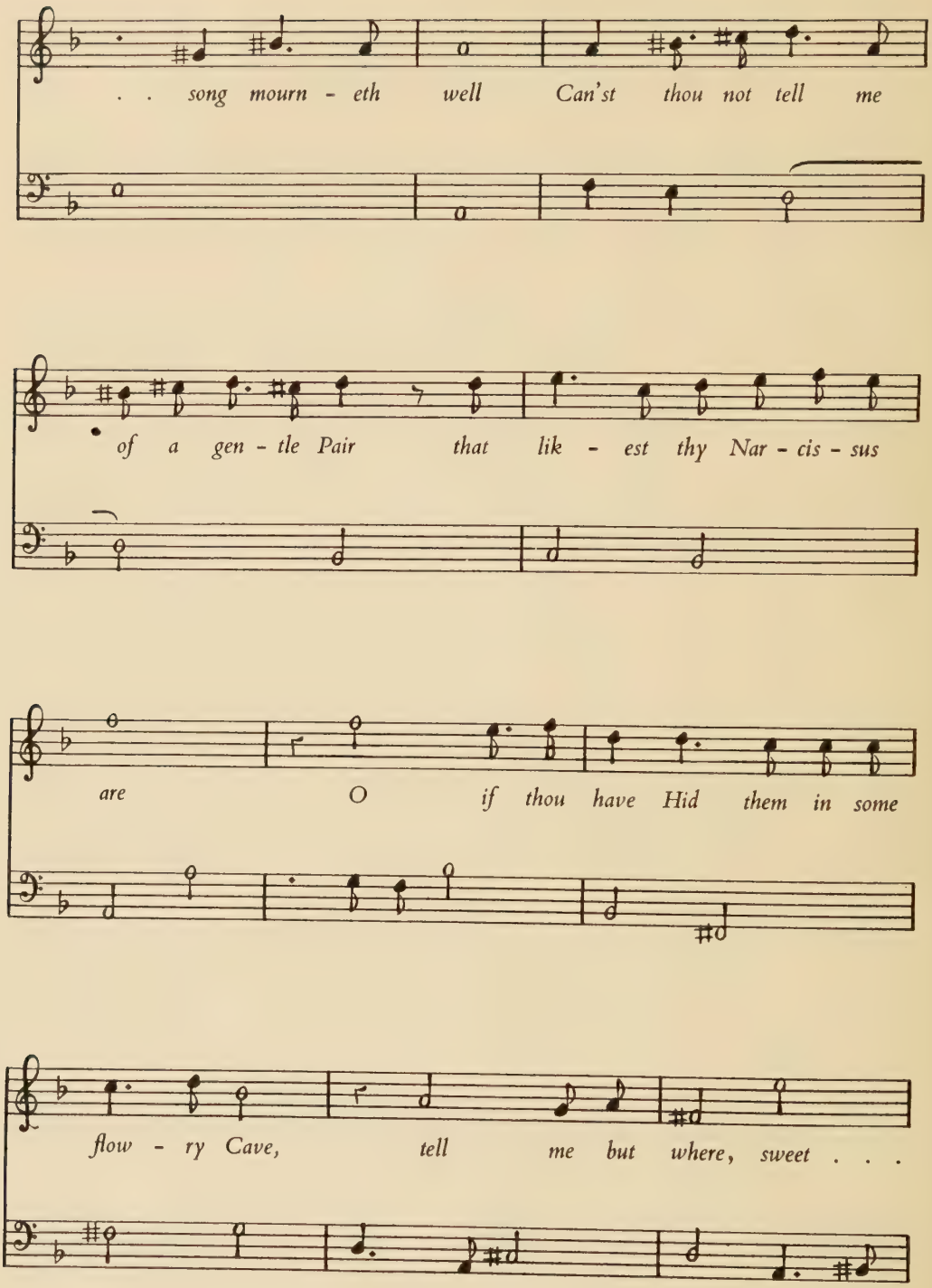
SONG ONE

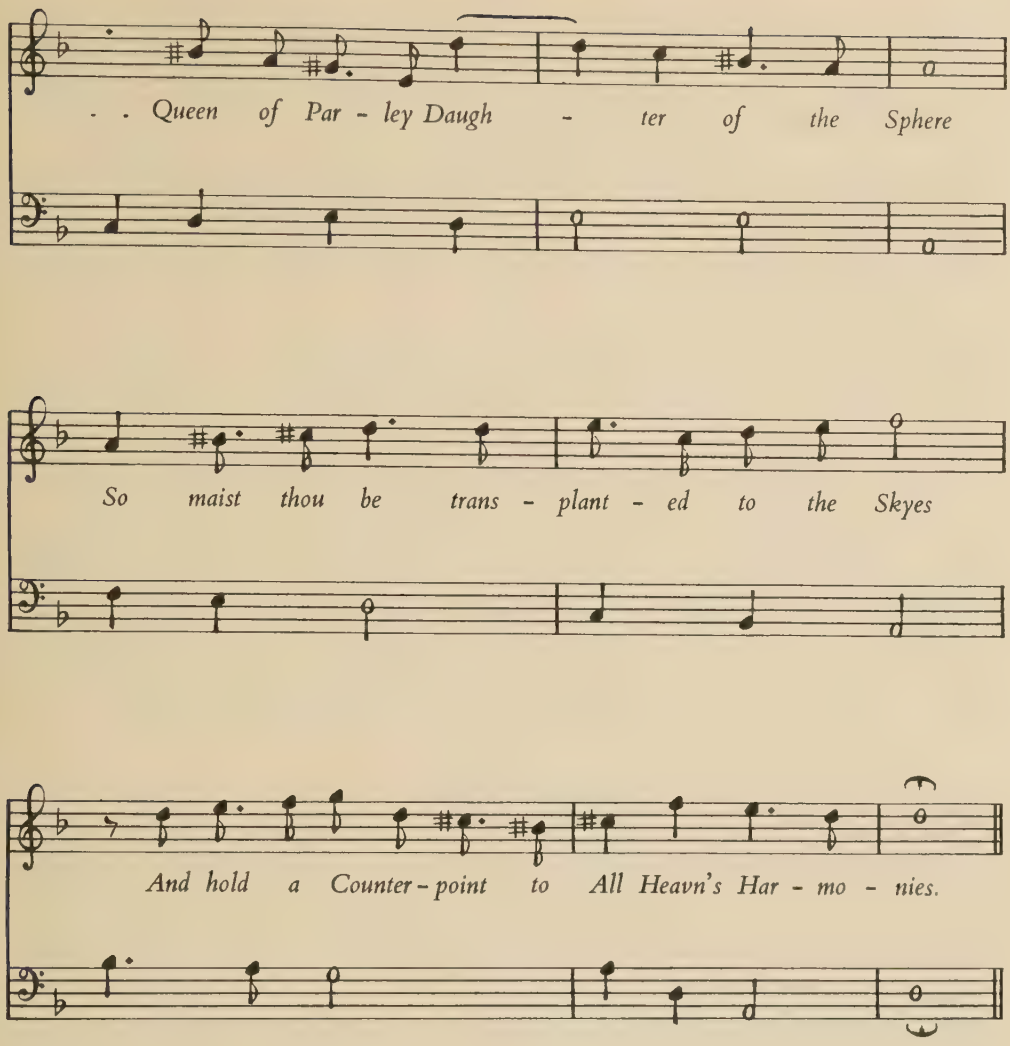

From the Heav'ns . . now I fly, and those hap-py Climes that
lie where day ne-ver shuts his eye up in the broad Fields
of the Sky There I suck the li-quid Air all a-midst the Gar-den
fair of Hes-pe-rus & his daughters three that Sing about the gold-en Tree:


I - ris there with hu - mid Bow wa - ters the o - d'rous Banks that blow
Flowers of more min - gled Hew than her pur - fled scarfe can shew
Beds of Hy-a-cinths . . & Ro - ses where many a Cherub soft . . re - po - ses.

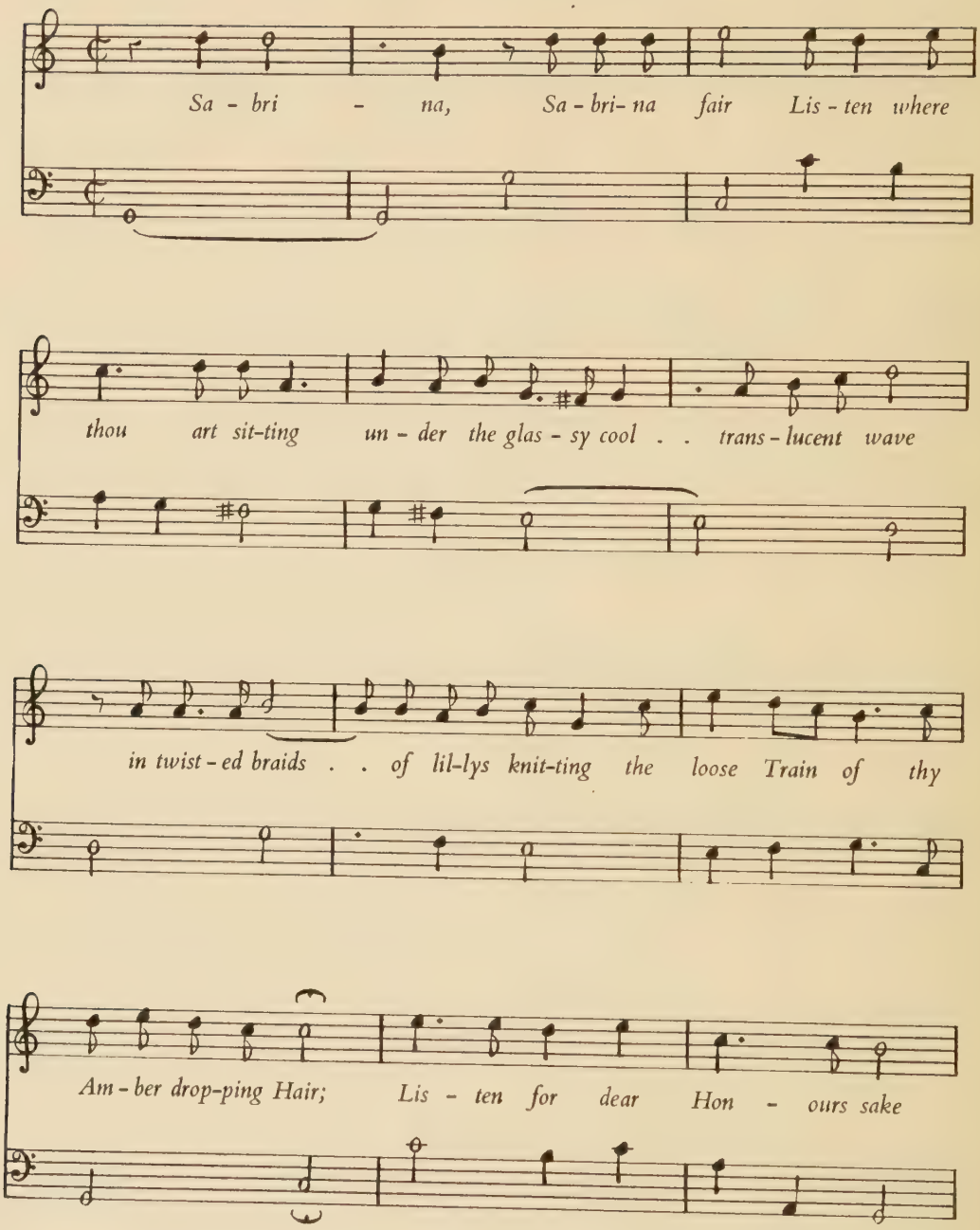
SONG TWO

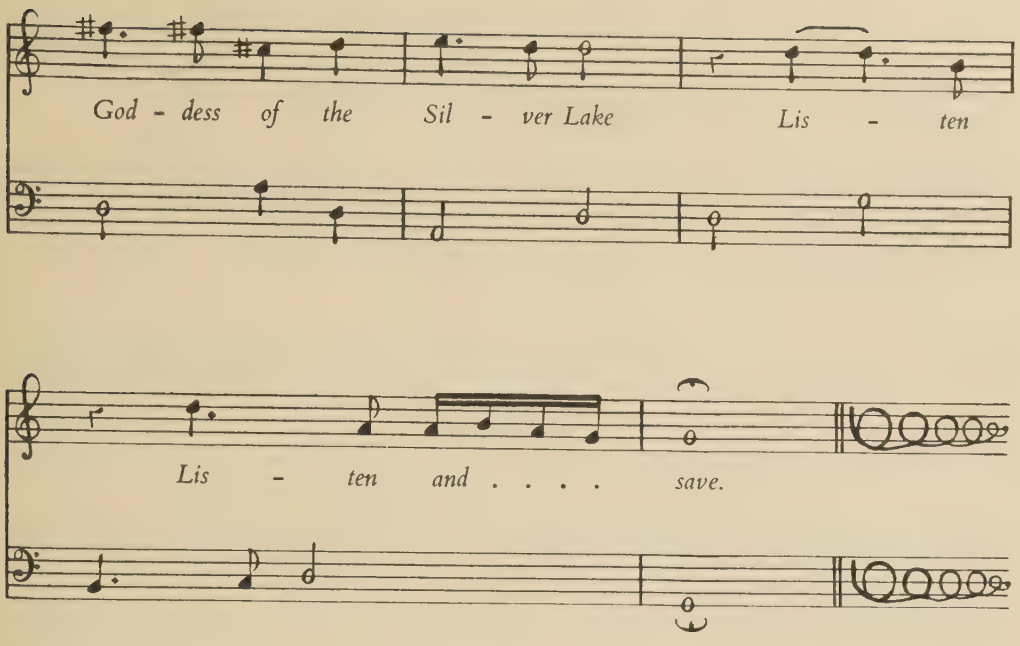

Sweet E-cho, sweet-est Nymph, that liv'st un-seen . .
. . with-in thy Air-y Shell by slow . . . Me-an-der's mar-gent
green, & in the vi-o-let em-broi-dered Vale
where the Love-lorn Night-in-gale night-ly to thee her sad


. . song mourn - eth well Can'st thou not tell me
of a gen - tle Pair that lik - est thy Nar - cis - sus
are O if thou have Hid them in some
flow - ry Cave, tell me but where, sweet . . .

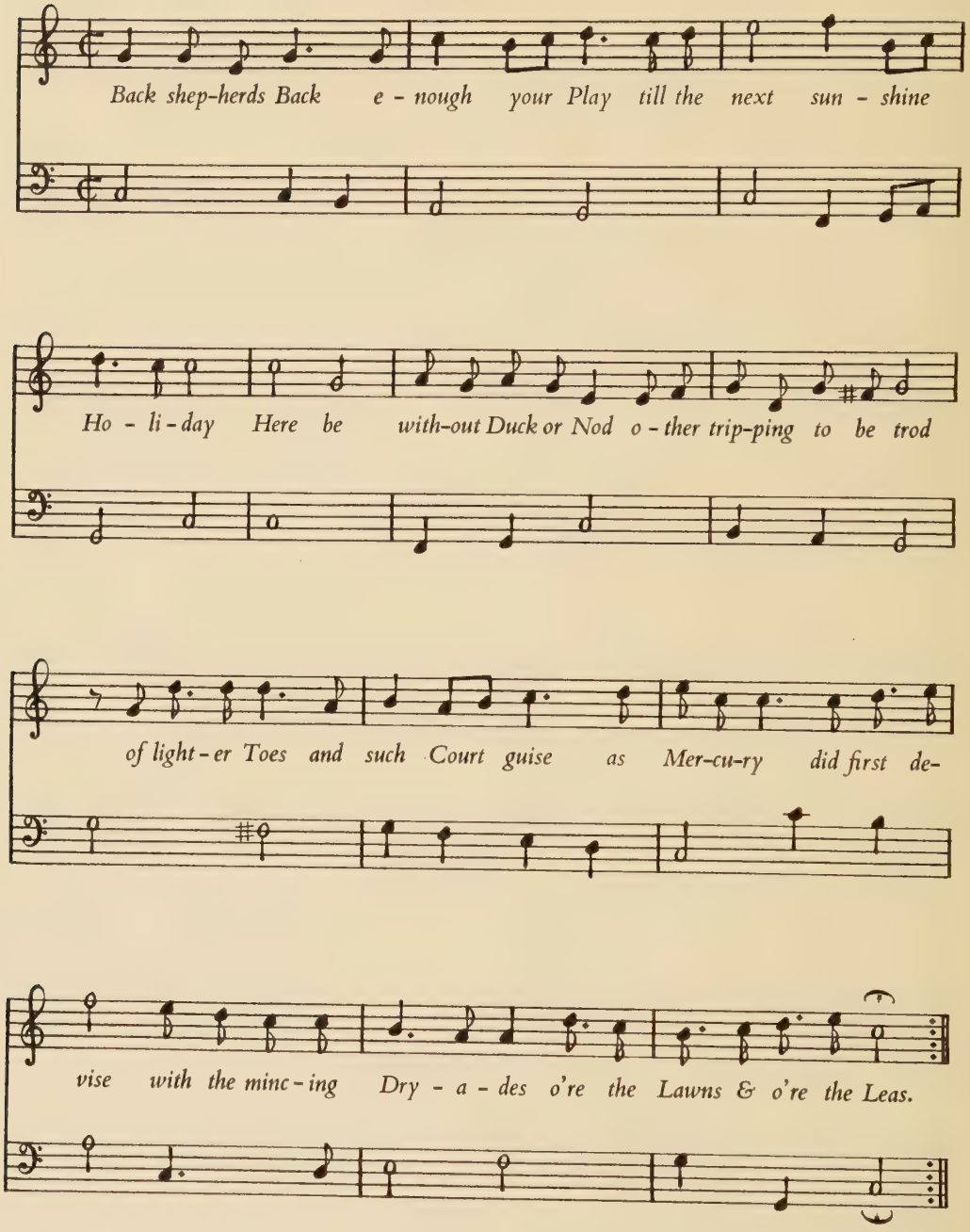

. . Queen of Par - ley Daugh - ter of the Sphere
So maist thou be trans - plant - ed to the Skyes
And hold a Counter - point to All Heavn's Har - mo - nies.

SONG THREE

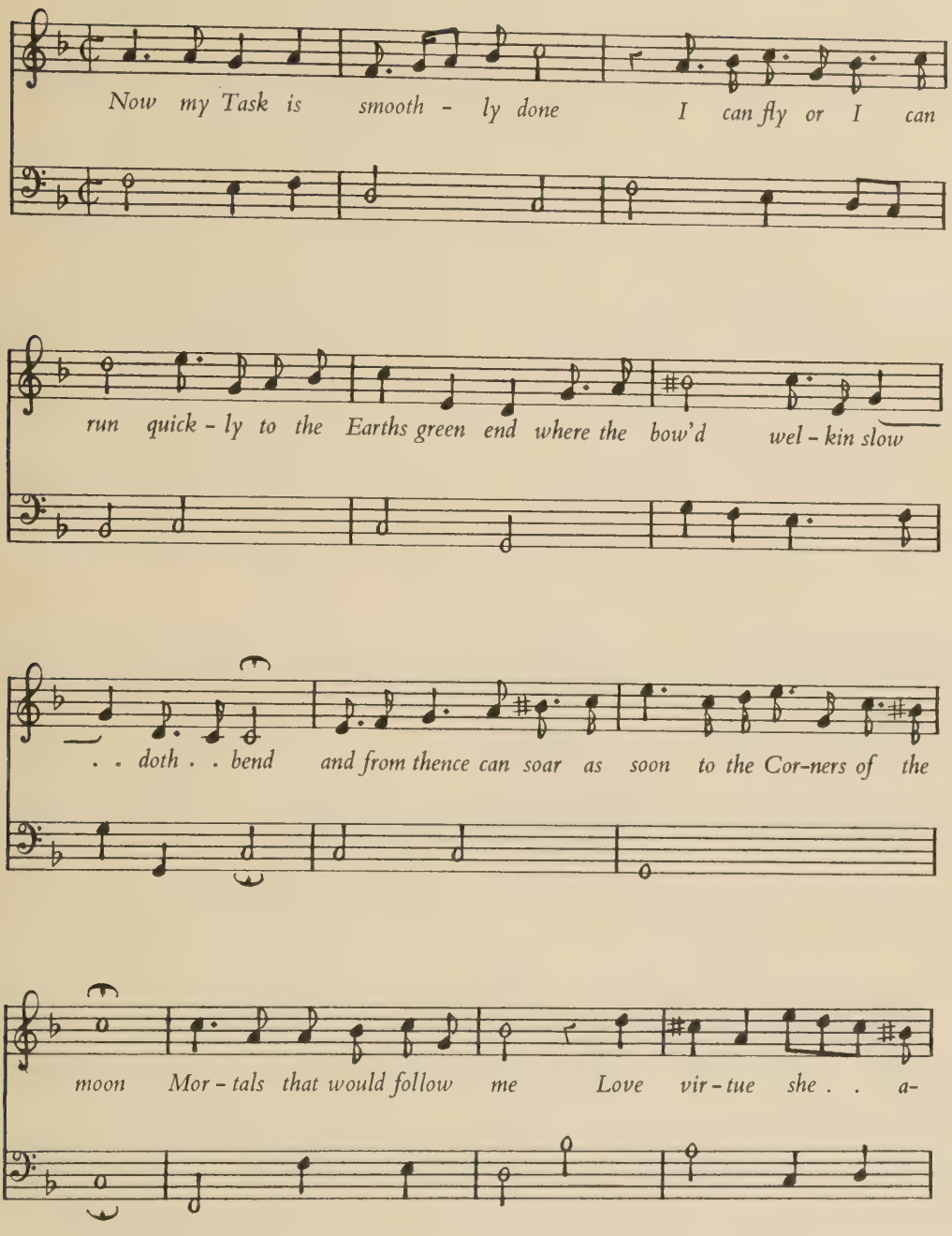

Sa - bri - na, Sa - bri- na fair Lis - ten where
thou art sit-ting un - der the glas - sy cool . . trans - lucent wave
in twist - ed braids . . of lil-lys knit-ting the loose Train of thy
Am - ber drop-ping Hair; Lis - ten for dear Hon - ours sake

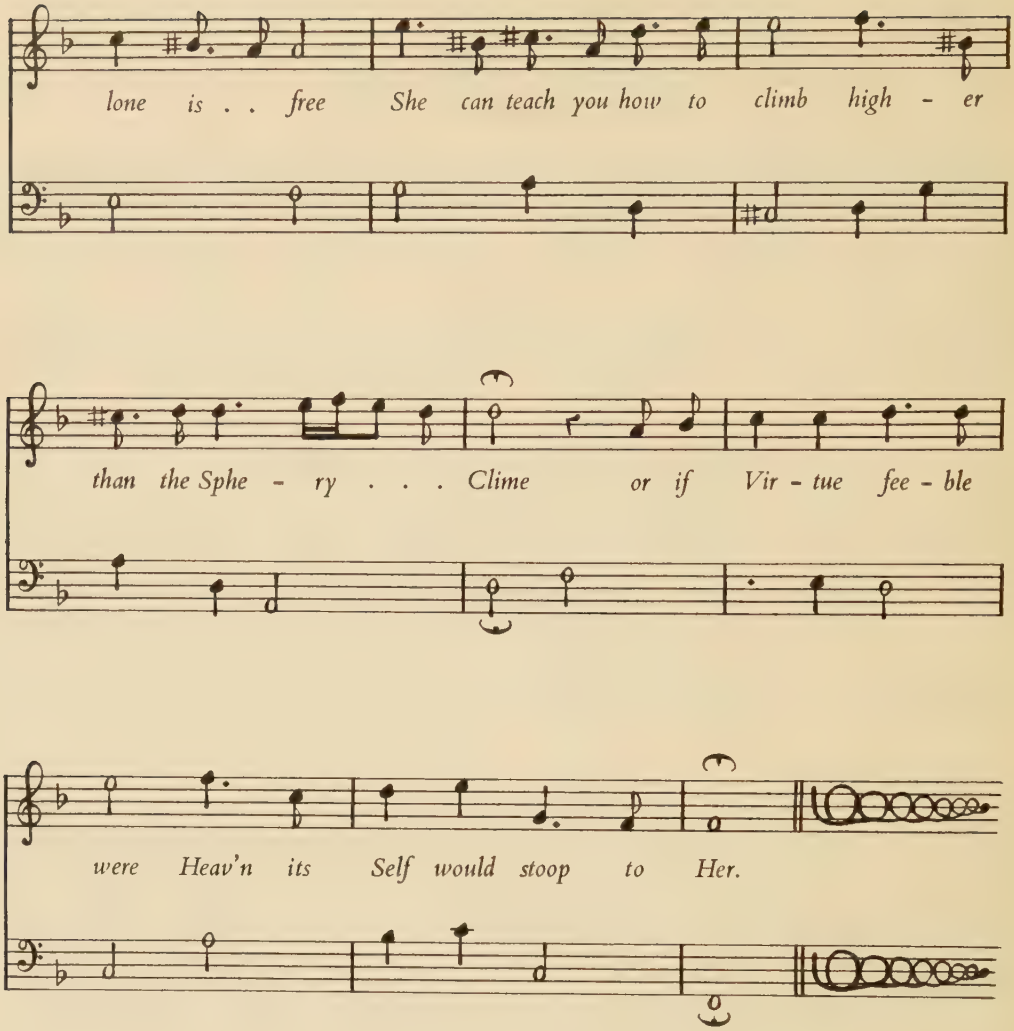

God - dess of the Sil - ver Lake Lis - ten
Lis - ten and . . . . save.

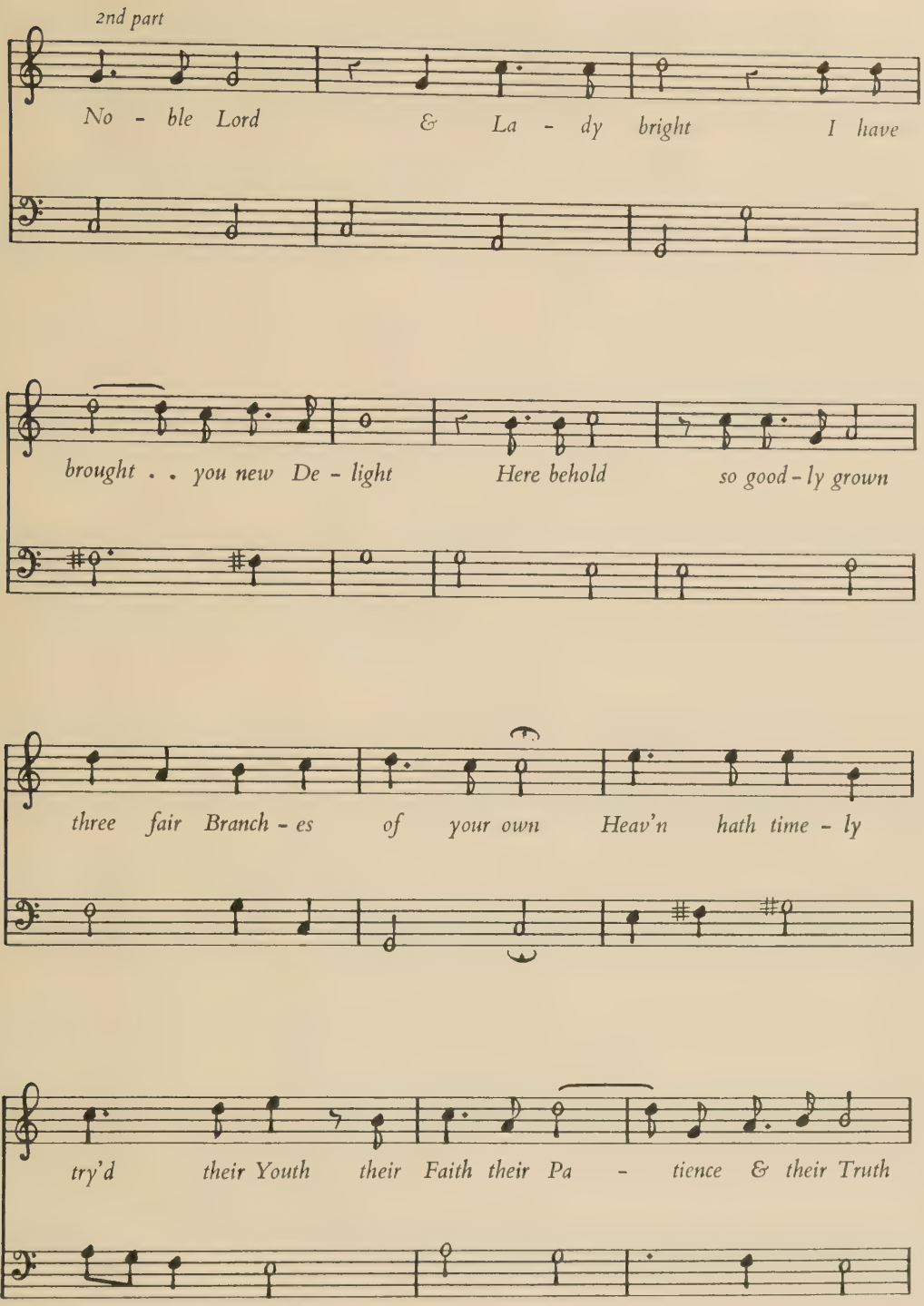
SONG FOUR

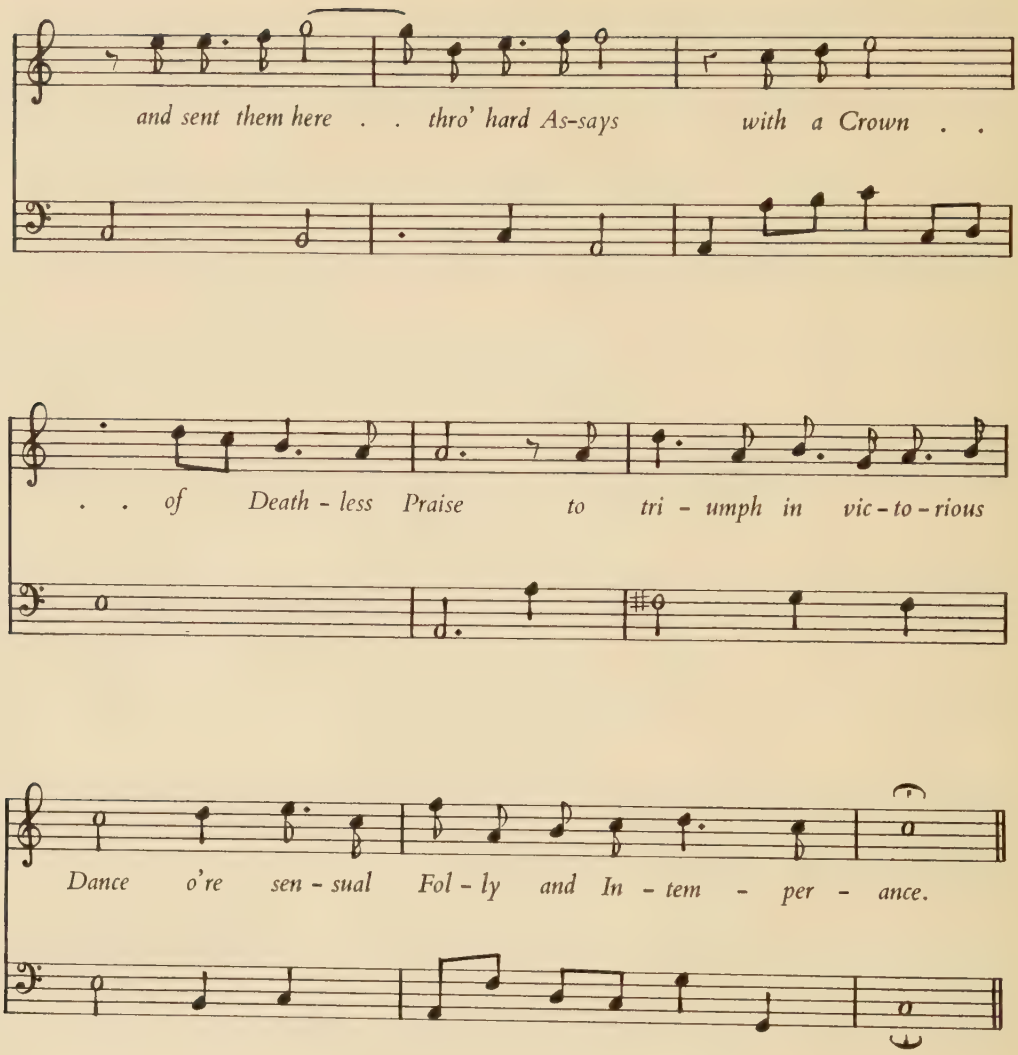
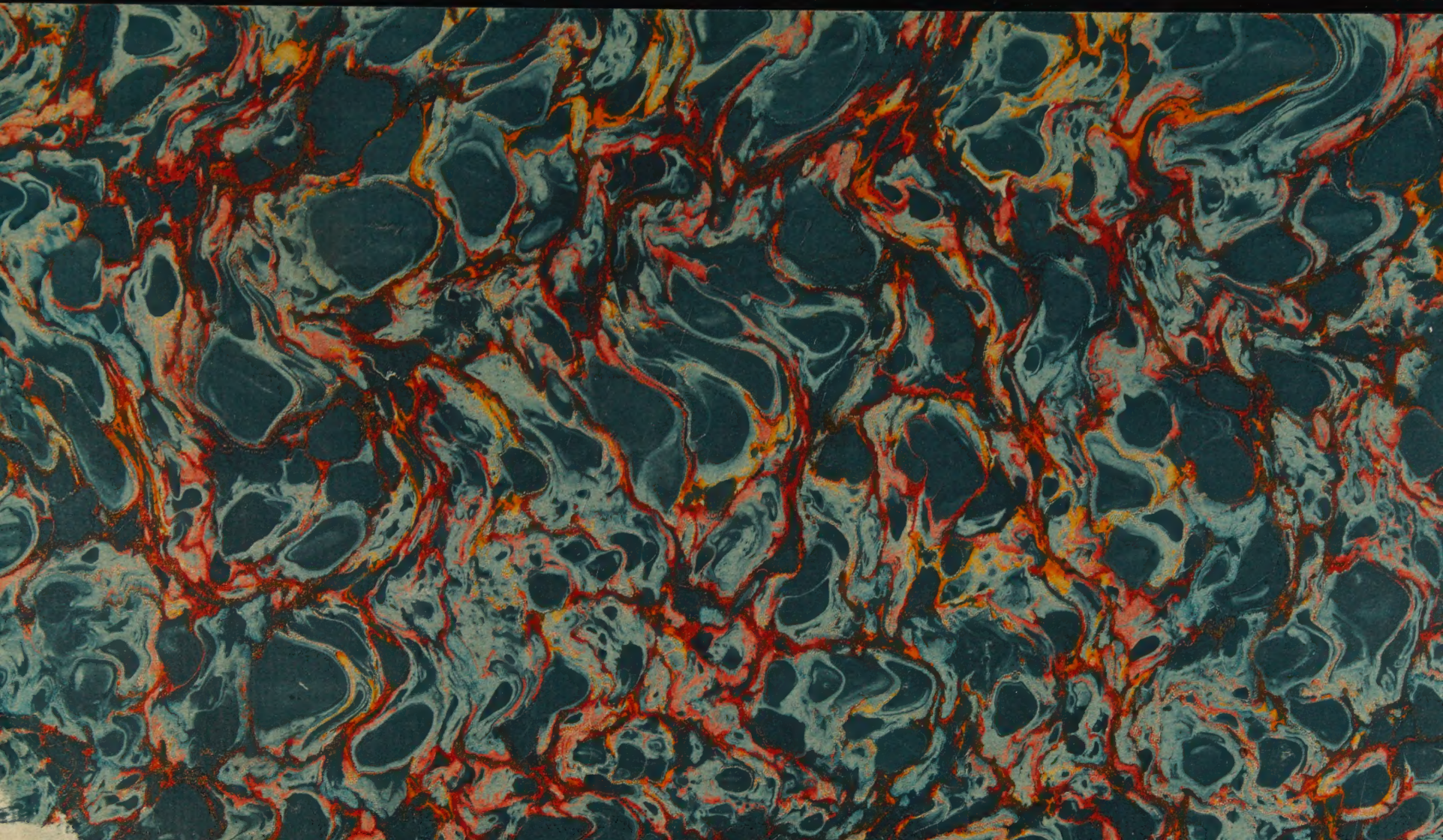

Back shep-herds Back e - nough your Play till the next sun - shine
Ho - li - day Here be with-out Duck or Nod o - ther trip-ping to be trod
of light - er Toes and such Court guise as Mer-cu-ry did first de-
vise with the minc - ing Dry - a - des o're the Lawns & o're the Leas.

SONG FIVE


Now my Task is smooth - ly done I can fly or I can
run quick - ly to the Earths green end where the bow'd wel - kin slow
. . doth . . bend and from thence can soar as soon to the Cor-ners of the
moon Mor - tals that would follow me Love vir - tue she . . a-


lone is . . free She can teach you how to climb high - er
than the Sphe - ry . . . Clime or if Vir - tue fee - ble
were Heav'n its Self would stoop to Her.


2nd part
No - ble Lord & La - dy bright I have
brought . . you new De - light Here behold so good - ly grown
three fair Branch - es of your own Heav'n hath time - ly
try'd their Youth their Faith their Pa - tience & their Truth


and sent them here . . thro' hard As-says with a Crown . .
. . of Death - less Praise to tri - umph in vic - to - rious
Dance o're sen - sual Fol - ly and In - tem - per - ance.

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